

NEUES ENTDECKEN
TALENTE FÖRDERN
IDEEN UMSETZEN

FWF

Der Wissenschaftsfonds.

In accordance with its funding guidelines of 1 January 2021 (as last amended), the FWF has issued the following

Application Guidelines for the ESPRIT Programme (valid from 15 March 2022)



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1. General information

1.1. Aim of the programme

The ESPRIT (Early-Stage Programme: Research, Innovation, Training) aims to foster the career development of researchers from all disciplines at the beginning of their academic career who wish to carry out an independent research project at an Austrian research institute. The principal investigator will be supported in their skills and career development by a mentor.

The objectives of ESPRIT are

- to promote excellent, innovative research,
- to retain, attract, and win back outstanding researchers and thus strengthen Austrian research institutes,
- to support outstanding women researchers,
- to promote career and skills development (develop/establish own research profile based on an independent research project),
- to enhance career prospects (boost competitiveness through publications, collaborations, and increased visibility).

The FWF places particular emphasis on the promotion of women: female ESPRIT principal investigators benefit from additional measures for women for the purpose, among others, of improving the visibility of successful women researchers and their networking, as well as from the provision of child allowances, if applicable, as additional funding. Furthermore, the FWF plans to award at least half of the projects in the programme to female principal investigators (see also [Section 3.](#)).

1.2. Submission

There are no deadlines; applications can be submitted on a rolling basis. Applications must be submitted exclusively online via the electronic application portal [elane](#). The project funding is administered through the research institution (PROFI); therefore, the application must be submitted by both the principal investigator and the responsible research institution. All the forms required for the application must be filled in online; the other documents such as the project description (incl. annexes) and the additional documents must be uploaded as separate files. For additional information, see the '[User manual – elane](#)'.

1.3. Who is eligible to apply?

All Austrian **research institutions** are eligible to apply. The application must be submitted together by the principal investigator and the research institution where the project is to be

carried out. The project must be carried out in Austria or under the auspices of an Austrian research institution at which the principal investigator works. Project-related stays abroad, for instance, for field research, can be scheduled and must be included in the project description.

The ESPRIT programme is addressed to highly qualified postdocs of all disciplines from Austria and abroad at the beginning of their academic career (see also the requirements in [Section 1.5.1.](#)). Since the funding of female researchers is an explicit goal of this programme, the research institutions are urged to especially encourage highly qualified women to apply for funding. Upon approval, the principal investigators are employed at the research institution that submitted the application; the principal investigator's salary is funded through the project.

The following **exclusion criteria** apply for principal investigators:

- Persons who at the time of submitting the application already have a position at the applying research institution that includes the prospect of permanent employment upon fulfilment of a qualification agreement (e.g., tenure track position) or a permanent contract of employment in a research position cannot serve as the principal investigator of an ESPRIT application unless the employment contract is linked to third-party funding.
- Researchers who have already completed a habilitation also cannot serve as the principal investigator of an ESPRIT project.

In the ESPRIT programme, researchers can serve only once as principal investigator.

An ESPRIT project requires the commitment on the part of a researcher working in Austria to act as **mentor** to support the career development of the principal investigator (see also [Section 1.5.2.](#) and [Section 1.5.3.](#)).

1.3.1. Can several applications be submitted simultaneously?

There is no limit to the number of applications that can be submitted by a **research institution**.

The following restrictions apply for **principal investigators** with regard to ESPRIT applications/projects and other simultaneous applications/projects:

- It is not possible for one person to serve as the principal investigator in several ESPRIT projects/applications.
- It is also not possible to submit parallel applications in other FWF programmes for the promotion of junior researchers (Erwin Schrödinger, Elise Richter, or Elise Richter PEEK).
- Please note that the number of ongoing/approved projects is limited for principal investigators in the ESPRIT programme. Further information on the restriction on the number of ongoing projects and the limit on the number of applications can be found at [Restriction on the number of projects](#).

- The principal investigators of an ESPRIT application can apply simultaneously to other organisations for funding for the planned research project; however, they are required to inform the FWF immediately in writing both of applications submitted to other funding institutions as well as the decisions made on these applications. The decision-making body in the FWF will decide whether and to what extent this third-party funding will be deducted from the funding through the ESPRIT programme. If substantially identical applications are approved by other national and international funding organisations, and the approved funding is sufficient to carry out the planned research project, the principal investigator must decide on one of the approved funding grants. It is not possible to combine them.

1.4. What types of projects can be funded?

Funding may be requested for projects in basic research that are clearly defined, innovative, convincingly described in terms of objectives and methods, and limited in time. Funding may also be requested for projects in the field of clinical research that are clearly defined in terms of objectives and methods, limited in time and budget, and the results of which are not connected with any direct commercial interests. For the requirements on clinical projects and specific standards regarding the content of the project description, see the information on the [Programme Clinical Research](#) and the [Application Guidelines for the Programme Clinical Research](#). In this case, a positive opinion from the relevant ethics commission or evidence of a fundamental approval/endorsement by that commission must also be attached. Projects are considered to carry out innovative basic research when they possess one or more of the following attributes: (i) research on new ideas and/or examination of new research questions, (ii) development or application of new research methods, new technologies, or original approaches to solving research questions, (iii) application or modification of existing methods, technologies, or approaches to new research questions. (Please note that the next logical step or the incremental further development of published data is not considered to be innovative or original).

Aspects of a research project that go beyond the realm of science and scholarship (e.g., applications of the research results in business, society, politics, etc.) may be mentioned in the application, but they will not play a part in the assessment of whether the project should be funded.

Principal investigators should be free to choose the fields of research, but the suitability of the applying research institution for the implementation of the planned research project should play a key role in their decision. The project must contribute to the principal investigator developing an independent research profile. In addition to the project description, a career and mentoring plan is required.

The **duration of funding is 36 months**. Double funding is not permitted (see [Funding guidelines](#)).

1.5. What requirements must be met to apply?

1.5.1. Requirements for principal investigators

The doctoral degree of principal investigators must have been awarded no more than five years at the time of application (approval and submission of the application by the research institution). The cut-off date is the date on the doctoral degree. Submission is possible before the doctoral degree is completed if the other application requirements are met, and if it appears that the principal investigator will receive the official doctoral degree within the expected processing time (approx. four months).

In addition, the principal investigator's publication record over the last five years must be internationally visible and commensurate with the expected career path in their field. The following criteria are decisive for assessing the publication record—documented in the additional *Publication lists* document (see [Section 2.2.4.](#))—and initiating the review process:

- **Quality assurance:** The primary publications for evaluating the publication record are those that have been subjected to a quality assurance procedure in line with high international standards (peer review or an equivalent procedure; peer review is expected in the natural and life sciences). The journals must usually be listed in the *Web of Science*, *Scopus*, or the *Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ)*. For journals not listed in those databases; monographs, edited volumes, or contributions therein; or other publication types, the principal investigator must provide a link to the publisher's website which contains a description of the respective quality assurance procedure. Should no such description be available on the website, it is the principal investigator's responsibility to provide evidence that the publication has been subject to a quality assurance procedure in accordance with the standards of the field.
- **International visibility:** Most of the principal investigator's publications must have a wider than national reach. In the natural sciences, life sciences, and social sciences, most of the publications listed must be in English.
- **Number/scope and quality** of the principal investigator's publications must be commensurate with the expected career path and the field. At least two publications must be quality-assured and internationally visible publications with a substantial and independent contribution on the part of the principal investigator. At least one publication with first, last, or corresponding authorship in the life sciences is required.

Should a principal investigator fail to meet one or more of the specified criteria, the principal investigator must include a justification with the application. In cases of doubt, the decision-making bodies of the FWF shall decide whether the research qualifications are adequate.

Consideration of career breaks

The FWF will take justified career breaks (e.g., parental leave¹, caring for a family member, long-term illness, and military or civil service, or research position in the non-academic sector) into consideration in assessing the principal investigator's eligibility to apply. Relevant information can be included in the academic CV and thus also be available to the reviewers. Besides the above-mentioned career breaks, the FWF will also take any relevant subject-specific education and/or training periods into consideration in the assessment of the five-year period mentioned in this section.

Inclusion of disabled and chronically ill people

The FWF will also take any exceptions to typical career paths due to disability and/or chronic illness into consideration in determining whether the principal investigator meets the application requirements. Relevant information can be included in the academic CV and thus also be available to the reviewers.

1.5.2. Requirements for the mentor (mentor profile)

The mentor must be an experienced, active researcher who is prepared to advise and support the principal investigator with regard to their long-term career development through the regular performance of their mentoring duties. The mentor does not have to work in the exact same field as the principal investigator, but the fields must be closely enough related that the mentor is familiar with the international and national context and the structures in the principal investigator's field. In the interests of career development, the mentor should not have been the previous supervisor of the principal investigator's master thesis, diploma thesis, or dissertation.

The mentor must be employed at least 20% at an Austrian research institution.

1.5.3. Mentoring duties

The mentor agrees to assist the principal investigator in their professional and personal career development. As such, the mentor agrees to perform the following mentoring duties:

- Assist in the development of an independent research profile,
- Assist in carrying out the project / research work,
- Assist in building networks and collaborations,
- Assist in integrating the principal investigator into the applying research institute,
- Provide strategic assistance in the principal investigator's further career planning and in defining and pursuing goals.

¹ Child-raising periods are taken into account (up to three years per child; men must provide proof of having actually cared for the children).

In addition to the mentor, other persons can take on mentoring duties which offers the benefit of a wider range of expertise (see also [Section 2.2.3.](#): Annex 3: Career and mentoring plan).

1.6. What types of funding can be requested?

1.6.1. Principal investigator's salary

The ESPRIT programme provides for the full-time employment of the principal investigator.² To cover the personnel costs of the principal investigator for the three year duration of the project, funding should be requested for a senior postdoc salary in accordance with the [FWF's personnel costs and salaries](#) for PROFI projects, including a fixed percentage increase for the subsequent year to compensate for wage rises.

1.6.2. Project-specific costs

In addition to the principal investigator's salary, a lump sum of €15,000 per year is approved to cover further project-specific costs (i.e., additional personnel costs such as staff and non-personnel costs that are essential to carry out the project and that go beyond the resources made available by the infrastructure of the research institute). The FWF does not finance the infrastructure or basic equipment of research institutions.

Of these project-specific funds, up to €2,000 per year can be used for coaching and/or professional development.

If additional funds that exceed the lump sum approved for project-specific costs are needed to carry out the project, a total of up to €25,000 per year can be requested by including a relevant justification in the project description. In this case, the total amount of requested funds must be broken down into the appropriate cost categories in the project description (see also [Section 2.4](#)).

1.6.3. Publication costs

As part of the [Peer-reviewed Publications](#) programme, the FWF provides additional funding upon request for publications resulting from approved projects, up to three years after the end of the project.

1.6.4. Child allowance

Female principal investigators who are employed full time after the birth of a child can receive a child allowance in the amount of €9,600 per child per year (= gross salary including

² As the ESPRIT programme is primarily designed to support the principal investigator and fund their own position, a 100% employment contract for the principal investigator must be requested for the entire duration of the project. If a fixed-term employment relationship exists at the time of application, the principal investigator must either withdraw from this before beginning the ESPRIT project or take a leave of absence from this position for the duration of the project.

all employer and employee taxes; paid out 12 times a year) up until the child's third birthday. The principal investigator can request the relevant funds at the time of concluding the funding agreement for an approved ESPRIT project or, in the case of an ongoing project, submit an additional application.

2. Application content and form

2.1. Sections of the application

For an application to be complete, it must contain the following sections.

2.1.1. Academic abstract

The academic abstract must be written in English and comprise no more than 3,000 characters (incl. spaces); it may not contain any formulas or special characters. The academic abstract is sent to potential reviewers (if they agree to participate, they will be sent the entire project description). The abstract must be subdivided into the following sections using the English terms provided below:

- Wider research context / theoretical framework
- Hypotheses / research questions / objectives
- Approach / methods
- (Level of originality / innovation)
- Primary researchers involved

Where options are given (indicated by slashes), please choose an option that is appropriate for your project. Besides the principal investigator, mentors must also be mentioned in the section on the primary researchers involved.

2.1.2. Project description

The project description comprises no more than 20 pages, including table of contents and, if applicable, cost justification, list of abbreviations, figures, captions, tables, footnotes, etc.

The project description must also include the following annexes on additional pages:

- Annex 1: List of literature cited in the application (References) on no more than 5 pages;
- Annex 2: Academic CVs and description of previous research achievements of the principal investigator and the mentor (no more than 3 pages per CV);
- Annex 3: Career and mentoring plan, no more than 3 pages;
- Annex 4 (optional): Collaboration letters of national and international cooperation partners (no more than 1 page per letter)

The project description incl. these attachments must be uploaded as *one* file named *Proposal.pdf*. This document will be sent to the reviewers by the FWF.

2.1.3. Additional documents

- **Mandatory:**
 - Publication lists for internal FWF use to assess the principal investigator's eligibility to apply and to check for conflicts of interest with potential reviewers.
- **Where applicable:**
 - Report on results or final report: If the proposed project is a continuation of an FWF-funded project, a report on previous results or a final report and a list of publications resulting from this previous project must be uploaded in the language of the application (no more than 6 pages).
 - Additional documents in the case of resubmission: If the application is a revised version of a previously rejected application (see [Section 2.5.](#)), response(s) to the reviews and an overview of all changes made in the resubmitted application must be uploaded.
 - If more than €15,000 per year in project-specific costs are requested, vendor quotes for equipment, where applicable: a vendor quote must be uploaded for every piece of equipment requested with an acquisition cost of €5,000 or more incl. VAT (can also be submitted in German).
 - If more than €15,000 per year in project-specific costs are requested, vendor quotes for the relevant funds requested as "Other costs" (e.g., coverage of costs for the use of research facilities, costs for project-specific work carried out outside the applicant's research institution, etc.) if these costs exceed €5,000.00 including VAT.
- **Optional:**
 - Cover letter to FWF.
 - List of up to three researchers (including, where applicable, previous reviewers, see [Section 3.](#)) whom the principal investigator would like to exclude from the review process, including a brief justification.

Any additional documents (e.g., recommendations on potential reviewers, letters of recommendation, forthcoming publications) will not be considered in further stages of the application process.

2.1.4. Forms to be completed

- **Required forms:** *Research institute assignment form, application form, contact form, programme-specific data form, cost breakdown, and co-authors form, and academic abstract*
- **Where applicable:** *Cooperation form*

2.2. Application content and form

2.2.1. Language of application

To allow applications to be reviewed by international scientific or scholarly experts, applications must be submitted in English. If desired, a version in German or another language may be added as a supplement; however, submission solely in German or another project-relevant language other than English is only permitted in exceptional cases. Such exceptions apply exclusively to applications from the fields of linguistic and literary studies which concern only texts in German or languages other than English. In all such cases, it is absolutely necessary to consult the responsible project officers in the FWF [Strategy – Career Development Department](#) prior to application and then submit an academic abstract for the project as well as a brief yet convincing statement explaining why submission in a language other than English is justified for substantive academic reasons. The final decision shall be made by the decision-making bodies of the FWF.

2.2.2. Formatting and length of the project description

The project description may not exceed 20 pages. It must contain a table of contents with page numbers. Desired components such as a list of abbreviations, figures, captions, tables, footnotes, etc. are to be included in the 20-page limit.

The continuous text in the project description, annexes 1-3, the publication lists, and the parts of the application to be uploaded, where applicable (see [Section 2.3.](#), excluding vendor quotes) must be written, without exception, in 11 pt. font with 1.5 line (15-20 pt.) spacing and at least 2 cm margins. A standard, easy-to-read font must be used for the continuous text.

Citations in the text and the list of works cited (“References”) in the application must be in line with the conventions of the respective discipline, preferably according to a widely used style guide (e.g., *Chicago Manual of Style*, *APA Publication Manual*). Principal investigators are free to choose the citation conventions or style guide they prefer, but they must apply them/it consistently throughout the application. If available, a [DOI address](#) (DOI = Digital Object Identifier) or another [persistent identifier](#) should be used for the literature cited.

2.2.3. Project description and annexes

The project description must contain the following sections designated by headings:

- (1) Table of contents
- (2) State of the art of the relevant international research (including own preliminary work, if applicable) and relation of the project to this context
- (3) Clearly defined aims and hypothesis/hypotheses or research question(s) of the project
- (4) Description of the project's anticipated level of originality or scientific/scholarly innovation
- (5) Methods

- (6) Intended [cooperation arrangements](#) (national and/or international) as part of the planned project. Please specify the people with whom the principal investigator aims to collaborate, what the subject of the intended cooperation arrangement(s) will be and what they will contribute to the project. All the national and/or international cooperation arrangements that are deemed in the project description to be essential to the project must be indicated on the *Cooperation arrangements* form and can be confirmed by a collaboration letter.
- (7) Work plan and timeline
- (8) Research-related qualifications of the researchers involved
- (9) All potential ethical, safety-related, or regulatory aspects³ of the submitted project and the planned handling of them must be described briefly in a separate section. These questions should be addressed briefly in the text even if the principal investigator believes the project does not raise any ethical issues.
- (10) A separate section must describe what sex-specific and gender-related issues⁴ the planned project may potentially give rise to, and how the applicant intends to deal with them. These questions should be addressed briefly in the text even if the principal investigator believes the project does not raise any sex-specific and gender-related issues.
- (11) Information on the suitability of the research institute for implementing the planned project and the project's contribution to enhancing the research institute
- (12) If more than the lump sum of €15,000 per year in project-specific costs is requested (see [Section 1.6.2.](#)), this must be justified briefly in a way that the reviewers find clear and understandable.

Annex 1: List of literature cited in the application (References) on no more than 5 pages.

Annex 2: The academic CVs and previous research achievements of the principal investigator and the mentor must be described on no more than 3 pages per person using the following guidelines and structure and the headings provided here in English.

- *Personal details:* Personal details (name, researcher unique identifier(s) such as [ORCID](#), research ID, etc., *no photos*), address of research institute and relevant websites. In addition, it is required to provide a publicly accessible link to the list of all published publications.
- *Education:* List of academic career with date, type, subject, and research institute of each

³ For instance, the European Commission's [Ethics for Researchers](#) or [The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity](#) can serve as a guide here.

⁴ Positioning and reflecting on the research approaches planned for the project in terms of sex-specific and gender-related issues, for instance: Is the research approach likely to produce sex-specific and gender-related findings? If so, what findings? How and where are these integrated into the research approach? (For information on checking the relevance of sex-specific and gender-related issues to a project, see <https://www.fwf.ac.at/de/ueber-den-fwf/gender-mainstreaming/fix-the-know-ledge/detailseite/>).

degree.

- *Position(s)*: List of research relevant positions (with the extent of employment in the case of part-time employment).
- *Career breaks*: Details of career breaks or delays (see also [Section 1.5.1.](#)).
- *Net research experience* (only required for CV of principal investigator): based on the previous information, the length of time (in years and months) that has actually been used in net total for research—calculated in such a way as to be equivalent to full-time employment—and broken down into the time before and after completion of the doctoral degree. This should make it easier for the reviewers to assess the principal investigator's qualifications in term of academic age.
- *Research interests*: Description of the main areas of research and the most important research results achieved to date.
- *Mentoring and supervision experience* (only required for CV of mentor): Description of previous experience as mentor with regard to mentees, completed programmes, career development measures, equal opportunities, gender awareness and competence, etc.
- *Academic publications*: List of no more than ten of the most important published or accepted academic works (*journal articles, monographs, edited volumes, contributions to edited volumes, preprints, proceedings, etc.*); for each publication, either a [DOI address](#) or another [persistent identifier](#) must be indicated, if available. In accordance with the [San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment \(DORA\)](#), journal-based metrics like the journal impact factor should not be included.
- *Additional research achievements*: List of no more than ten of the most important scientific/scholarly research achievements apart from academic publications, such as awards, keynote lectures and other conference papers, important research projects, research data, software, codes, exhibitions, knowledge transfers, science communication, licenses, or patents.

Annex 3: The career and mentoring plan must be no longer than 3 pages and be written together with the mentor. The name of the research institute and the mentor must be stated at the beginning of the document. After that, the following content must be addressed using the English headings provided here for this purpose.

- *Qualification/Expertise*: Skills and knowledge that the principal investigator already possesses or intends to acquire (for example, methodological expertise, relevant courses, additional academic activities such as teaching, etc.) in order to successfully implement the proposed project and to achieve the next career level.
- *Career goals*: Long-term and medium-term research and career goals of the principal investigator; contribution of the proposed project to achieving these goals.
- *Research profile*: Contribution of the planned research to establishing an independent research profile of the principal investigator, and a description of this profile.

- *Networking*: Networking opportunities that provide principal investigators with new insights and prospects and help them to increase their visibility in the scientific community and the resources used to do this.
- *Mentoring*: Description of how the mentor will assist the principal investigator in achieving their individual goals and skills development.
- *Interaction between mentor and mentee*: Details on the interaction between the principal investigator and the mentor (for example, how often they meet to discuss topics, monitoring of progress, etc.).
- *Additional mentoring support* (optional): Where applicable, names, their research institutions, and specific roles and expertise of any additional people that perform mentoring duties.

Annex 4 (optional): Confirmations (each no more than 1 page) of national and international cooperation partners who are convincingly stated in the project description as being essential for the implementation of the project.

2.2.4. Additional documents

The form requirements (font type and size, line spacing, and margins) of the project description also apply for the additional documents, except for documents not prepared by the principal investigator, such as vendor quotes for equipment and services.

Publication lists: Lists of all academic works of the principal investigator and the mentor published over the last five years (journal articles, monographs, contributions to edited volumes, publicly accessible preprints, etc., broken down into “quality-assured publications” and “other publications”)⁵ must be uploaded in one PDF file with the name *Publication_list.pdf*.

The publication lists are used to check for any conflicts of interest with reviewers, but they will not be forwarded to the reviewers. The publication list of the principal investigator also helps the FWF to assess their eligibility to apply in accordance with [Section 1.5.1](#).

2.3. File formats, file names, and online forms

2.3.1. Mandatory parts of the application

Files (to be uploaded):

- *Proposal.pdf* (= project description incl. annexes 1-3 and where applicable 4, with PDF bookmarks, at least for the major sections)

⁵ Publication lists must include: all authors, complete titles, journal, year, and page numbers. For each publication, either a [DOI address](#) or another [persistent identifier](#) should be indicated; for publications with more than 20 authors, an “et al.” reference can be used.

- *Publication_list.pdf* (= publication lists of principal investigator and mentor, in one single document)

Forms (to be filled in online):

- *Research institute assignment*
- *Application form*
- *Contact form*
- *Programme specific data*
- *Cost breakdown*
- *Academic abstract*
- *Co-authors*
- *Cooperation* (optional)

2.3.2. Optional file uploads

- *Cover_Letter.pdf* (= accompanying letter)
- *Negative_list.pdf* (= list of reviewers who should be excluded)
- *Follow.pdf* (= results report or final report of previous projects for follow-up applications)
- *Overview_Revision.pdf* (= in the case of resubmission, overview of all changes made in the resubmitted application)
- *Revision.pdf* (= in the case of resubmission, an overall response to all the reviewers or, if preferred, a short response to each reviewer saved in a separate file: *Revision_A.pdf*, *Revision_B.pdf*, etc.)
- *Quotes_equipment.pdf*
- *Quotes_other_costs.pdf*

2.4. Eligible project-specific costs

If the principal investigator only requests the €15,000 per year lump sum approved for project-specific costs, then only the cost categories “Personnel costs” (employment contract at a senior postdoc salary, 100% employment) and “Other costs” (project lump sum of €15,000 per year) must be completed in the *Cost breakdown* form for each of the three years of the project. If funds that exceed this lump sum are requested, then the respective amounts must be entered in the appropriate cost categories. Funds may only be requested for the following cost categories: personnel costs, equipment costs, material costs, travel costs (including costs for the presentation of project results at conferences), contracts for work and services, other eligible costs (as specified for stand-alone projects (for details, see [Application Guidelines for Stand-alone Projects](#)) as well as costs for coaching and/or

professional development (max. €2,000 per year; to be entered under “Other costs” in the *Cost breakdown* form).

2.5. Revising a rejected application (“resubmission”)

A resubmission is defined as the revision of a rejected application which—regardless of the programme category—deals with the same or similar research questions. Where a principal investigator submits an application on the same or very similar research questions yet does not consider it to be a resubmission but an entirely new project, the principal investigator must submit a separate accompanying letter to the FWF Office explaining how the research questions have in fact changed. For example, changes in research methods alone are not sufficient for a proposal to qualify as a completely new project. In cases of doubt, the decision-making bodies of the FWF shall decide.

- An accompanying letter containing an overview of all changes made in the resubmitted application must be submitted to the FWF. This overview will not be passed on to the reviewers.
- Response(s) to reviews: The principal investigator can decide whether the response(s) should only be forwarded to the previous reviewer concerned or to all reviewers. These response(s) should address the suggestions and criticism expressed in each review of the previous application and point out the changes made on that basis. Such responses are not necessary in the case of reviews written by persons who are to be excluded from the review process for the resubmitted application. However, such exclusions must be justified and will also be counted toward the *list of reviewers to be excluded* (see [Section 3.](#)) for the resubmission.

If all the reviewers are to receive these responses, the principal investigator must submit a document containing an overall response. If these responses are to be passed on only to the reviewers who were previously involved, the principal investigator should include a short response to each review in a separate document.

Resubmissions must show changes. If an application has been rejected for the reasons for rejection C3, C4, and C5, these changes need to be substantial (based on the comments in the reviews). If such changes are not made, the application will be returned without review by the decision-making bodies of the FWF.

There is no deadline within which a resubmission of a rejected application must be submitted, but any relevant application requirements must be considered. Submission of a resubmission follows the application procedure described in [Section 2.5.](#), meaning that it is submitted as a new independent application and not as an additional application to the previously rejected application.

3. Processing of and decision on the application

The FWF Office undertakes a formal check of the application. A detailed description of the decision-making process, the criteria for selecting international reviewers, as well as the detailed rules on conflicts of interests and the composition of expert juries and boards can be found in [General Principles of the Decision-making Procedure](#).

The **review process** is expected to take about 4–5 months. Information on the average duration of the review process will be available in future on the FWF-Dashboard. When the review process is completed, the FWF Board considers the reviews and decides whether the application should be supported. The FWF plans to award at least half of all ESPRIT projects to female principal investigators: In the case of equal qualifications and equal quality of projects, applications by female principal investigators will be given priority, especially in disciplines in which women are underrepresented at the FWF as principal investigators. In general, the approval rate for projects by female principal investigators must not be less than that for projects by male principal investigators. The applying research institute and the principal investigator are informed in writing of the FWF's decision.

At least two reviews are required for approval of an application.

Requests for changes and returning applications without review

The FWF will not process incomplete applications, those which do not comply with the FWF's regulations or which contain formal errors (in particular, if the maximum length permitted is exceeded), unless and until the principal investigator has rectified the problems within a reasonable period of time (generally three weeks). If the problems have not been resolved within this period of time, the decision-making bodies of the FWF will return these applications without review. Similarly, the decision-making bodies of the FWF will return without review applications that have been previously rejected by the FWF and resubmitted without appropriate revisions.

All applications meeting the FWF's formal criteria will be sent out for review. The reviewers (generally persons working outside of Austria) are selected by the members of the FWF Board and confirmed by the decision-making bodies of the FWF.

Once the review process has begun, no more changes can be made to the application.

The most common reasons why applications are returned without review by FWF decision-making bodies are (a) that the principal investigator's track record of publications does not meet the requirements (see [Section 1.5.1.](#)) and (b) that the application does not address specific hypotheses or research questions (see [Section 2.2.3.](#))

Reasons for rejection

The reasons for rejecting an application will be assigned one of five categories (C1–C5) and will be sent to the principal investigators along with the reviews. A detailed description of the

FWF's rules concerning conflicts of interests can be found in the [General Principles of the Decision-making Procedure](#).

Resubmissions

If the application is a resubmission of a previously rejected application, the FWF will generally contact those reviewers who provided *constructive* criticism on the previous application. Reviewers who gave entirely positive or negative comments will generally not be contacted for a second review. However, please note that all resubmissions are also evaluated by new reviewers.

Proposal bans

Applications that are rejected for reason C5 will be barred for 12 months (from the date of the decision) and cannot be resubmitted during that period.

Applications that have been submitted three times and rejected for reasons C3 or C4 (i.e., the original application and the respective resubmissions) are also barred for 12 months (from the date of decision); rejections for reasons C1 or C2 do not count towards this total.

In general, only topics are banned, not principal investigators or applying research institutions.

Exclusion of reviewers

As stated in [Section 2.1.3.](#), principal investigators may upload a separate document with a list of up to three reviewers who should not be asked to review the application due to possible conflicts of interest. The applicant must give reasons for why they wish to exclude certain reviewers. If the reasons given hold up to scrutiny, the FWF will generally fulfil such requests and will exclude those reviewers from the review process. A detailed description of the FWF's rules concerning conflicts of interests can be found in the [General Principles of the Decision-making Procedure](#).

Please note that the FWF does not wish to receive, nor will it consider a list of possible reviewers from principal investigators.

4. Compliance with legal requirements and standards of research integrity

The FWF would like to point out that the research institute must comply with all legal requirements and safety provisions (e.g., Federal Disabilities Act) that apply for the ESPRIT project and obtain all the necessary permits (e.g., from the Ethics Commission, the Commission for Animal Experimentation, the Federal Monuments Authority Austria, or the relevant foreign authorities).

The [Guidelines for Good Scientific Practice](#) of the Austrian Agency for Research Integrity (ÖAWI) are to be observed.

Where a breach of these standards is suspected, the case will be investigated by the ombudsperson of the responsible research institution. At any rate, the research institute must report any cases of suspected serious deviations to the [Austrian Agency for Research Integrity \(ÖAWI\)](#). The FWF reserves the right to suspend any procedures related to applications or ongoing projects, either partly or entirely, until such investigations have been concluded.

For more detailed information, see [FWF procedure in cases of suspected scientific misconduct](#).

5. Publication of project data and results

The FWF would like to point out that should the project be approved, the FWF will publish on its website a summary of the project in German and English for public relations purposes—which must be sent to the FWF when returning the grant agreement—as well as the amount of funding granted and, on project completion, summaries of the final report of the project. The content of these summaries is to be written in such a way as to safeguard the legitimate interests of secrecy for reasons of national security and patent rights and to guarantee that trade secrets are protected appropriately. Guidelines for writing PR summaries can be found [here](#).

In addition, the FWF requires a data management plan (DMP) for all approved projects. This should also be sent to the FWF when returning the grant agreement. The template for the DMP can be viewed and downloaded [here](#).

In the case of approved ESPRIT projects, a declaration of support from the proposed mentor, including the original signature, must also be submitted to the FWF together with the funding agreement and the DMP.

For any kind of publication of project results (e.g., academic publications, research data, conference papers, and media reports), principal investigators must comply with the guidelines specified in the funding agreement on acknowledging the FWF as the funding institution and the FWF's [Open Access Policy](#).

Annex 1: Notes and questions for reviewers in the ESPRIT programme⁶

In all of its programmes, the FWF actively supports equal opportunities and equal treatment. The review of an application must not put researchers at a disadvantage for non-research-related reasons such as age, gender, etc. For example, the review of applications should not focus on the researcher's actual age, but on the relation between the researcher's previous research achievements and the length of their research career. Our commitment to equal opportunities also means taking into account breaks or delays in the principal investigator's research career (e.g., due to parental leave; long-term or chronic illness; disability; caring responsibilities; etc.), which may have led to publication gaps, atypical career paths, or limited international research experience.

Only the most important academic publications (no more than 10) and the most important additional research achievements (no more than 10) of the principal investigator are to be considered when evaluating the application. As a signatory to the [San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment \(DORA\)](#), the FWF also emphasises that, in assessing research performance, reviewers should refrain from using journal-based metrics such as the Journal Impact Factor.

Please review the present application⁷, using the following eight assessment criteria: 1) innovation and originality, 2) quality of the planned research, 3) approach and feasibility, 4) principal investigator's qualifications, 5) ethics and gender, 6) contribution to career development and suitability of the mentor, 7) suitability of the research institute, and 8) overall evaluation. For each of these criteria except 5) we ask you for both written comments and a rating on a scale from "excellent" to "poor". Please be aware, however, that the FWF's funding decision will be based primarily on reviewers' written assessments rather than the ratings assigned.

Please keep in mind that sections 1 and 2 will be forwarded to the applicant in its entirety and in anonymous form.

Section 1:

1. Innovation and originality

Is the proposed research innovative? Does it make an original contribution to its field?

⁶ Further information can be found on our website: [FWF's corporate policy and mission](#) or [Application Guidelines for the ESPRIT Programme](#).

⁷ The application must meet the FWF's formal requirements. Please bear these in mind when writing your review. (Key formal requirements: 20 pages max. for the project description including figures and tables; 5 pages max. for the list of references; 3 pages max. for each academic CV, including a description of previous research achievements and the ten most important publications. For further details see [Application Guidelines for the ESPRIT Programme](#).)

2. Quality of the proposed research

Are the research questions formulated clearly? Are they timely, challenging, and likely to lead to relevant insights?

3. Approach and feasibility

Is the research design well-conceived, clearly formulated, and suitable for answering the research question(s)? Is there a well-organised work plan? Have the methods been chosen well and does the proposal describe them in sufficient detail?

4. Qualifications of the principal investigator

How well is the principal investigator qualified to carry out the proposed research? How would you assess the academic qualifications of the principal investigator? In evaluating the principal investigator's qualifications, please consider their career stage, taking into account unusual career paths and circumstances that may have slowed down their progress (e.g., parental leave, long-term or chronic illness, disability, caring responsibilities).

5. Ethics and gender

Ethics: Have ethical considerations been addressed satisfactorily?

Gender: The principal investigator is required to address any relevant sex-specific and/or gender-related elements inherent in their research questions and/or research design. Please assess whether their treatment of these components is adequate.

6. Contribution of the research project to the career development of the principal investigator and the suitability of the mentor and the planned career development measures for increasing the principal investigator's long-term career prospects

Does the research project contribute to the principal investigator developing an independent research profile? How important is the research project for continuing to develop the principal investigator's skills? Is the mentor qualified to assist the principal investigator's career? Are the planned measures (in terms of mentoring, networking, acquisition of skills, etc.) described in a plausible manner and can they be expected to contribute to the principal investigator's career development?

7. Suitability of the research institute for implementing the planned project and the project's contribution to enhancing the research institute (expected added value)

Can the principal investigator turn to the research institute (or, where applicable, to the cooperation partners) for expertise on the respective subject area? Is the project integrated into the activities of the research institute and does the project contribute to enhancing the research institute?

8. Overall evaluation

What is your overall impression of the project proposal? Specifically, what would you consider its key strengths and weaknesses? Please give reasons for your answers, taking as much space as you need.

Section 2: Optional recommendations for the principal investigator

If you are in favour of the project being funded, you may want to add to the formal assessment in section 1 by making further and perhaps more informal comments or suggestions here. However, please note that these remarks, too, may impact on the FWF's funding decision, especially if they amount to substantive criticism of the project.

Section 3: Confidential remarks to the FWF

Please use this space to make any comments that you do not wish to be conveyed to the principal investigator. Feel free to also give us feedback about the evaluation process and your interactions with us.